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Spyros Spyrou

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Introduction

In recent years, the study of childhood as a social phenomenon has gained increasing attention from sociologists, anthropologists, and historians. Theoretically, the study of childhood has moved away from structural explanations that assumed children to be passive and largely at the mercy of cultural forces and towards theoretical paradigms that see children as social actors engaged in the production and reproduction of culture. A particularly influential work in the field of childhood studies, which set as its goal to theoretically rethink childhood, was the edited volume *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood* (James and Prout). The contributors to the volume built on previous work and attempted to problematize childhood as a category by situating it in specific social, cultural, and historical contexts. In their introduction to the volume, the editors argued for the need to examine childhood as a social construction and not as a natural category, and to look at it in relation to other social variables such as class, gender, and ethnicity. They also argued that children and childhood are constituted by different discourses that are in turn constituted

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by children's lives. The new theoretical emphasis was to be on children's daily lives in context. Similarly, the methodological call was for ethnographic studies of childhood that would give a voice to children and describe their lives as they are lived in specific socio-cultural contexts (James and Prout 3-5, 8-9; see also James, Jenks and Prout).

Since then several studies have contributed in this direction (Frones, Hutchby and Moran-Ellis, James, Jenks, Mayall 1994, 1996; Morton, Thorne). In these studies, what children do, think, and feel are important questions. Moreover, it is the ordinary—the everyday of children's lives—that is key to understanding how children's identities are constituted by their worlds and how in turn children constitute them through their activity (de Certeau). In this article, I am concerned with how Greek Cypriot children attending elementary school in Cyprus construct their ethnic identities in the flow of everyday life. Ethnic identity construction in childhood has enormous potential for illuminating our understanding of the power and limitations of collective identities as they take shape at a particular stage in the lifecycle. We still know little about how children negotiate their identities as they move in and through a variety of social contexts. We also know little about children's ways of constructing their identities in the face of contradictory messages from their environments. Using ethnographic evidence from the classroom and from extra-educational contexts like the playground, I illustrate how children construct and negotiate their ethnic identities as they situate themselves in a constantly shifting world.

The data presented come from fieldwork carried out in Cyprus from July 1996 to July 1997. Two communities, one urban and one rural, and their respective schools have been studied. The urban community is situated in the old sector of Nicosia, the capital of Cyprus adjacent to the buffer zone that separates the Turkish-occupied north from the free south. The rural community is located north west of Nicosia on the Troodos mountain.

The project utilized a variety of data-gathering techniques to collect rich and detailed information on the social construction of ethnic identities from the children's perspectives. In-depth interviews were carried out with the children, their parents, and their teachers as well as other relevant agents of socialization from the two communities. Participant-observation formed another main technique for gathering data both within the school and in a variety of social contexts outside the school like the home, the religious instruction school, the church, and the playground where children participated and expressed their ethnic identities. Projective techniques like drawings, essay writing,

and poem interpretation were also used as well as a variety of sorting and ranking techniques where children were asked to sort and rank countries and ethnic groups (Spyrou).

Education in Cyprus is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Culture. It is highly centralized and both curricula and textbooks are centrally prescribed for all schools. Public elementary education starts at a minimum age of five and a half years old and lasts for six years. The overwhelming majority of students who attend public elementary schools are Greek Cypriots. A small number of Armenian Cypriots, Maronite Cypriots, and Greeks (other than Greek Cypriots) attend public elementary schools while even smaller numbers of Turkish Cypriots, British, Americans, Lebanese, other Arabs, and foreign Armenians are also recorded in official statistics as attending public schools.

The urban school I studied was a medium-size school with 85 students and 10 teachers. The rural school, a district school that served three neighboring villages, was much smaller, with 18 students and 2 teachers. The smaller size of the rural school meant that certain subjects like history and geography that are relevant to ethnic socialization were covered to a lesser extent than in the urban school. In general, the smaller size of the school practically meant that ethnic socialization was secondary to the children's education. Thus, for example, while in-school activities like play performances or poem recitations were common on national celebrations in the urban school, they were quite infrequent at the rural school. The urban-rural distinction is significant in another contextual sense. The urban community is near the buffer zone while the rural community is far away. The stimulation that the urban children received, living next to the division line, was significantly different than that received by the rural children. The urban children participated quite frequently in demonstrations, visited the guard posts and saw on a daily basis the soldiers, the flags, the sandbags, and the barbed wires. The rural children lacked opportunities to participate in such events while the experience of living next to the buffer zone was absent from their daily lives. Inevitably, these contextual differences lead to differences in the children's ethnic socialization and in the way they construct both behaviorally and cognitively their ethnic identities.

History

Identity construction is firmly rooted in history; more precisely, in the various interpretations of history that shape how individuals and groups understand the past. The rich and multi-layered history

of Cyprus is particularly amenable to interpretation and contestation as the country continues its turbulent historical course into the twenty first century.

In its long history, Cyprus has been occupied by numerous powers. Though the island was hellenized by the second millenium BC, its many conquerors left their cultural marks on the Cypriot people. For understanding contemporary issues of identity construction in Cyprus, the Ottoman rule of the island in the late sixteenth century is an important historical period to consider. The Turkish Cypriot community of the island grew out of the first Ottoman soldiers who were stationed on the island and later by conversions of Greek Cypriots to Islam. When Cyprus came under British colonial rule (1878-1960), the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities experienced their first problems as each community turned to its respective motherland, Greece and Turkey, for a sense of collective identity. During the years 1955-9 Greek Cypriots carried out an anti-colonial war with the purpose of overthrowing the British and uniting Cyprus with Greece. The result of this war however was not a union with Greece but the granting of independence to the island.

During the 1960s, intercommunal strife broke out and both Greece and Turkey got directly involved in what came to be known as the "Cyprus problem." The rise in 1967 of a dictatorship in Greece led to disagreements between the dictatorial government and the government of Cyprus. An ultra-nationalist group directed by the Greek dictators engaged in underground terrorist activity to overthrow the government of Cyprus and unite the island with Greece. This activity culminated with a coup against the government of Cyprus carried out in 1974. Though the coup failed, Turkey claiming to intervene in order to protect the Turkish Cypriot minorities invaded Cyprus and occupied 37% of its territory. Since 1974 the two communities have lived apart and a physical boundary separates the Turkish-occupied north from the free south that is controlled by the Republic of Cyprus.¹ Negotiations between the two sides have so far proved to be unsuccessful in finding a solution to the problem.

Discourses of Identity: Hellenocentrism and Cypriotcentrism

More than two and a half decades after the Turkish invasion in Cyprus, questions of identity among Greek Cypriots are as controversial as they have ever been. Though constructions of identity come in a variety of shades, two discourses have dominated Greek Cypriot politics since Cyprus's independence in 1960, namely Hellenocentrism

and Cypriocentrism. The former emphasizes the Greekness of Greek Cypriots and has been the ideological position propagated primarily by the political right wing and foremost among them the nationalists. According to this ideology, Greek Cypriots are, above all, Greeks. Hence, for Hellenocentrists the primary political objective is to ensure the preservation of the island's Greek character and to maintain and enhance its close links with the motherland, Greece. Because of their nationalist orientation, Hellenocentrists erect strong symbolic boundaries between "our" Greek identity and "their" Turkish identity. The Greek language, Greek Orthodoxy, and Greek culture at large, represent for Hellenocentrists the very essence of Greek Cypriots' identity. Consider below how one teacher understands his identity from such a Hellenocentric point of view:

I agree with the thought that says we are Greeks, Greekness, the Greek-Orthodox, the Greek Christian, which appears in the three and one-half thousand years of the recent history which is common for Greece and Cyprus, that it is the right ... that Greekness is the most right [thing] that we must promote [the idea of] being Greeks. That's how Cyprus has lived, through Greekness and Christianity. If it did not have these foundations, this strength, it would not have been able to exist at all.

At the other end of the ideological pole is Cypriocentrism. As an ideology, Cypriocentrism has emphasized the Cypriotness of Greek Cypriots. Although Cypriocentrists would not denounce the Greek heritage of Greek Cypriots, they tend to emphasize the Cypriot identity which all Cypriots, whether Greek Cypriots, Turkish Cypriots, or members of any other ethnic group, share in common. It is for this reason that Cypriocentrists tend to favor rapprochement between the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities of the island and the collapse of any boundaries of ethnic animosity and hatred. The independence of Cyprus as a state is the most significant element that Cypriocentrists seek to preserve. Traditionally, Cypriotism has found most of its support in the political left wing. Support for Cypriocentrism was particularly strong in the years following independence and even more so in the years following the Turkish invasion of Cyprus. In recent years, Cypriocentrism has been weakened by a revived Hellenocentric camp (Mavratsas, Peristianis). To see how the two ideologies contrast, consider how one parent interviewed described her Cypriocentric position on identity: "Since we are an independent state we must say that we are Cypriots. As a left wing person, that's how I feel. I am a Cypriot." Later on she added that she

considers herself to be a "Philhellene" rather than a Greek.

Hellenocentrism and Cypriocentrism inform much of the politics of ethnic identity on the island. What children hear and learn is largely colored by these two ideologies of identity. The educational system has traditionally been most influenced by Hellenocentric ideology with most textbooks and curriculum guides being the same as those used in Greece. Today, the school system is still largely Hellenocentric in its outlook, emphasizing "our" Greekness as a people and propagating a national or Greek history.

Although the official ideology of the educational system is Hellenocentric, in practice it is the teachers who are assigned the task of informing students about their identities. Teachers may have a variety of ideological beliefs about identity which they may pass on to students directly or indirectly in the classroom. When teachers present children with messages that are not in line with the official Hellenocentric position of the educational establishment, they often do so in an indirect or ambiguous manner. Outside school, children may encounter a whole variety of ideological voices that may include both the Hellenocentric and Cypriocentric varieties as well as all varieties of ideological positions in between. This multivocality often gives rise to contradiction and ambiguity since the various voices that the children encounter are not in line with each other. In their day-to-day lives, children construct their identities in multiple ways as they move from one social context to another and as they confront different possibilities and constraints.

In and Out of School: The Shifting Contexts of Identity Construction

The school, and the classroom in particular, is a constraining social context for ethnic identity construction. The official curriculum defines the overall framework within which instruction may take place. Although teachers' practices are not determined by the curriculum, they are, nevertheless, constrained by it since they are expected to follow it (i.e., use certain textbooks and not others, cover certain material and not whatever they wish, and so on). According to the official curriculum guide, teachers are expected to cultivate and reinforce in children a strong sense of national identity, that is, to instill in them that they are above all Greeks. Teachers are expected to teach a national history, a history that emphasizes the struggles of the Greek people. The history of Cyprus, to the extent that it is covered, is treated as part of this larger, more encompassing, national history.

Through this process of helping children construct a strong sense

of national identity, teachers often make reference to the nation's Others, its enemies. Given the Turkish occupation of Cyprus, the primary ethnic enemy that clearly emerges in contemporary Greek Cypriot identity constructions are the Turks. Consider how this is done in the context of a classroom lesson in Greek with the 5th grade. The teacher tries to explain to children the difference between 'state' and 'nation,' a distinction that many children had difficulty comprehending given the primacy of nationalistic education that takes place in the classroom. The class was discussing a passage on the EOKA (National Organization of Cypriot Fighters) anti-colonial war. This war that took place from 1955 to 1959 was an attempt by Greek Cypriots to overthrow British rule and unite Cyprus with Greece. When the war ended however, Cyprus did not unite with Greece but became an independent state.

Teacher: Ah, whatever celebration Greece celebrates, Cyprus celebrates too. Whatever celebration Cyprus celebrates, Greece celebrates too. Why? Aren't we two separate states?

Thomas: Sir, we have the same customs and we speak the same language. [The] Greek and Cypriot [ways of speaking] do not differ...

Teacher: Therefore, children, as Thomas said, since we have one language, one religion, the same common history, the same history, we constitute—both states—one...

Thomas: State.

Teacher: No. It is two separate states. But we constitute a...

Thomas: A state. A big state.

Teacher: We constitute one ethnicity, the Greek ethnicity. We are all Greeks. Simply, all those who reside in Greece are Greeks of Greece and all those who reside in Cyprus are Greeks of Cyprus. Greeks of Cyprus and Greeks of Greece. Therefore we should always feel inside us [pause] Greeks. Right? Why should we always feel Greeks? Because we are Greeks. Should we be proud of this? We always say that we must remember that we must feel proud to be Greeks. That is, should we be proud in order to continue to feel Greeks?

Thomas: Yes.

Teacher: Why? What good does Hellenism have if we compare it with other civilizations?

Alekos: It has ancient monuments.

Teacher: Ancient monuments which declare that they have an ancient ... ancient civilization. The ancient civilization of Greece, the ancient spirit of Greece, was it something worthy, something renowned or did it not have any value?

Thomas: It was something renowned sir. Because the whole of the then known world learned Greek letters and only in Greece commerce was so advanced. And the Romans sir, who then controlled the whole of the then known world, [unintelligible] in order to show to their children the Greek letters...

Teacher: There is cooperation between the two states, Greece and Cyprus. In all areas. Kypros mentioned cooperation in commerce. Where else do we have cooperation which makes other countries react?

Kypros: When Turkey sees that [unintelligible].

Teacher: Therefore it cooperates in the military area as well. That is, in case something happens Greece is committed, it has promised, it has committed to us that it will too fight on our side. Okay? Greeks and Cypriots together. And if we [i.e. Cypriots] disappear slowly, slowly, they [i.e., Greeks] will disappear too. Because the Turks do not stop, they are insatiable; they will not stop so easily. They constantly want and want [more]. They want to keep taking but they would not give anything in return.

Kypros: That is why we have [military] exercises. They also bring airplanes from Greece.

That "we are two states, yet one nation" is not common sense to many of the children. The above excerpt illustrates an attempt to explain this idea but before the teacher explains what the idea of the state implies—since it is obvious that the children are not clear about its meaning—the discussion shifts to the idea of the nation. The political independence of the Cypriot and Greek states is never fully explicated. Instead, what they share in common—their shared nationhood—becomes the focal point for much of the discussion. "We are all Greeks. Simply, all those who reside in Greece are Greeks of Greece and all those who reside in Cyprus are Greeks of Cyprus," the teacher said. The aim is to establish similarity rather than draw attention to difference. Addressing difference could potentially challenge the notion of a national identity, but many teachers are unwilling to do so

because of the risks involved. Any perceived challenge to "our" national identity would constitute betrayal that would get a teacher in trouble if a parent with strong Hellenocentric beliefs complained. It is much easier and less risky to collapse internal boundaries (i.e., between Greek Cypriots and other Greeks) and to focus on erecting external ones (i.e., between Greeks and Turks). Though for Greek Cypriots other Greeks may constitute a certain kind of "Other," they are unlike other "Others." Schools are expected to help build a strong sense of national identity rather than challenge it. What is shared is, of course, an obvious starting point for establishing a sense of national identity. But as the end of the above excerpt shows having a common Other may equally serve the same purpose; it may help to collapse any, however weak, boundary between 'us,' as Greek Cypriots, and 'them,' as mainland Greeks. In other words, we are not one nation simply because we have a common language, a common religion and so on, but also because we have a common enemy, the Turks.

The children's affirming role in the exchange is typical of how students aid the teacher's underlying ideological goal, that is, to propagate national identity. The curricular expectation is that children construct identities that reflect this Hellenocentric emphasis. Indeed, early on children become skilled at using the appropriate speech genres that further substantiate and reify the messages of the text and the teacher. To put it another way, they become skilled in self-presentation so that their contributions are affirming of contextual expectations. This is not to say that children do not resist or challenge the assumptions of this ideological position, for they do. On some occasions, I have observed children actively provide contradictory evidence or resist the teacher's injunctions. I have also observed teachers and students negotiate the meaning of lessons in ways not prescribed by the official curriculum. That in practice meaning is constructed and reconstructed through dialogue is indicative of the flexibility inherent in most socio-cultural contexts. Having said this however, my observations revealed that most children, most of the time, chose to conform to the lesson espoused by the teacher in the classroom when it aimed to promote a clear sense of national identity. Children recognized what was expected of them to successfully participate in the context of the classroom and they chose to fulfill those expectations.

As a key context for identity construction, the classroom also establishes the parameters for appropriate language use. In line with the Hellenocentric ideology that schools are expected to promote, the classroom is also the context where children have to learn how to use language properly; to develop a strong sense of national identity,

children must learn how to speak proper Greek.

Following Charles Ferguson's terminology, the linguistic situation among Greek Cypriots may be described as diglossic (see Ioannou, Karoulla-Vrikkis, Sciriha 1995, 1996; Stamatakis 1991, 1994). Greek Cypriots use two linguistic varieties of the Greek language: the Greek Cypriot dialect of Greek and what I will refer to as Standard Modern Greek (SMG). Though the dialect differs in terms of grammar, vocabulary, and phonology it is still largely comprehensible by mainland Greeks. It is, nevertheless, one of the most recognizable markers of identity that sets, at one level, Greek Cypriots apart from other Greeks.

SMG is the high variety of the language and as such it carries a lot of power and prestige. It is, after, all the variety used almost exclusively in writing, to teach at school, and to converse in all official or formal encounters. In contrast, the dialect is what is learned at home, the variety one uses in most daily encounters and in all contexts defined as informal. As the low variety, the dialect is considered to be harsh, unsophisticated, and backward. In daily social practice, the two varieties are not as sharply differentiated however; it is quite common for many Greek Cypriots to switch back and forth from one variety to the other as they find themselves in situations that require such changes. Similarly, it is quite common for Greek Cypriots to exhibit a considerable degree of code mixing within the same context.

As an instructional context, the classroom is defined as a formal, public setting where only SMG is appropriate. In general, teachers in both of the schools I studied more often than not used SMG in the classroom. On those rare occasions when the teachers used the dialect, it was either by mistake or because they were illustrating something for which SMG was not appropriate or finally because they were trying to be emotionally expressive (e.g., to express anger, make a joke, etc.). The children, on the other hand, did quite often switch during a lesson from SMG to the dialect.² In most cases the teacher immediately corrected the student. A switch in pronunciation to the dialect by a student would be readily substituted with the equivalent 'proper' word from SMG by the teacher, for example from *eshi* (dialect) to *ekhi* (SMG). Dialect words are considered to be inappropriate because they are rough and impolite.³ Those who are educated or who are in the process of being educated must come to see that SMG has more value and is more prestigious.

The teachers themselves knew the contextual limitations in SMG's use. They would rarely, if ever, correct a child who spoke to them or other children in the dialect during the break or in any other context

outside the classroom. But they were much more likely to engage in such corrective behavior inside the classroom. The classroom is a context in which 'polite' language must be used. Thus, when Trifonas, a boy from the fifth grade, used in the classroom the dialect word *pomine* (wait) instead of the SMG word *perimene*, the teacher responded with: "This word is not polite to use in class." In this way, the teacher communicated to the children that SMG is preferable to the dialect because it is more polite, but he also set the classroom apart from other social contexts by defining it as a formal context in which the dialect is inappropriate.

Despite a constant process of negotiation that is taking place in the classroom, it is important to remember that the teacher-student relationship is characterized by power differences and that the negotiation process is more often than not in favor of the teacher who possesses the power to demand that SMG and not the dialect be used in the classroom. Nevertheless, the classroom is but one context for the construction and expression of ethnic identity. Children participate in several other contexts (e.g., the home or the playground) daily and these different contexts confront them with different constraints and possibilities. In most contexts outside the classroom, especially in contexts outside the school, children turn to the more intimate and familiar linguistic code, namely the dialect. With the exception of their formal encounters (e.g., with older, non-intimate others) children use the dialect to communicate. It is a code they can expertly use since it is the primary medium of linguistic interaction for most of their encounters. The dialect is an acceptable code for much of daily life's interaction needs. In fact, it would appear as out of place and pretentious for someone, a child in particular, to use SMG in contexts otherwise defined as dialect contexts.

At both the home and the playground, children overwhelmingly used the dialect. The home is a context where the child interacts with intimate others: mother, father, siblings, or other close relatives such as grandparents. It is a context where the child is not expected to project an official identity—one that seeks to impress or increase one's projected worth but rather his or her informal self in all its ordinarieness. Like the home, the playground is also an intimate, informal context where children interact with their peers and express a great deal of emotion: happiness, joy, anger, and frustration. The children's greater familiarity and comfort with using the dialect allows them to communicate and simultaneously express emotion in a fashion that is not contrived or prescribed but feels rather natural and free. On those rare occasions when the children did turn to SMG as was the case

when making jokes that mimicked formal encounters, their choice was conscious and intentional and aimed to have a particular effect (e.g., laughter).

In much the same way that children turned to the dialect in most of their interactions outside the classroom, they also drew more heavily on subject matter that is more localized, more Cypriot than national. Though they were primarily led to cultivate and express a strong sense of national identity in the classroom, when outside the classroom and more so outside the school, they constructed and expressed their identities utilizing voices that were much more informed by their particular experiences as Greek Cypriot children living in Cyprus rather than as members of a more generalized or abstract Greek nation.

Much of the children's play reflected this tendency. Irrespective of their parents' ideological positions (i.e., whether Hellenocentric or Cypriocentric), most children drew on Cypriot history and culture to construct and express their ethnic identities. In the urban community, a group of children, under the leadership of Nikiforos, a sixth grade boy, produced a variety of skits that they staged for other children in the community. Nikiforos had an intense interest in rural, village life and many of the skits he wrote and directed reflected this interest. The skits depended heavily on the use of the dialect and most of the character names were stereotypical dialect names, names that are typical in rural Greek Cypriot villages. Most skits focused on themes surrounding traditional Greek Cypriot life while some of them were preoccupied with the 1974 war. Nikiforos's and the other children's ideas that went into making these skits came from sketches they watched on TV utilizing traditional Cypriot life motifs. As Nikiforos explained: "On Sundays I watch Cypriot films from which I get ideas. Traditional words, traditional things. In a sketch, for example, I might mix several from those shown on TV and I make one out of them. Ideas, village words."

Consider the following skit entitled "The Murder" of which Nikiforos gave me a script copy that is typical of the skits he writes. Nikiforos was planning to stage this skit but he never actually did. The play includes a narrator and nine actors (five female and four male roles). All the names of the characters are traditional Cypriot names often used in sketches presented on TV or radio (e.g., Stavris, Martou, Yiorkou, Yiannis, Elengou, Pinou). The story line of the skit is as follows: In a Cypriot village there is a rich and a poor family. The rich family are money-lovers and stingy and are jealous of the love that characterizes the poor family. The father of the rich family goes

to the fields and finds and kills the father of the poor family. The various scenes of the skit focus on the dramatic events of the murder and the mourning of the dead. At the end of the play, the narrator interprets for the audience the symbolic significance of the play:

Yiannis [i.e., the poor father] is our Cyprus and his whole family are the Cypriots who lived in tranquility and who were disturbed by an act and are now divided. And Periklos [i.e., the murderer] is the Turks who disturbed our love and cut it in two like a snake. The co-villagers are us who try to provide consolation and to liberate ourselves.

The characters in this and all other skits Nikiforos writes, speak in a variety of voices that reflect a number of ideological positions held by the larger Greek Cypriot society. The theme of peace and tranquility that was disturbed by the coming of the Turks or the idea of jealousy (i.e., that Cyprus was a place others, including the Turks, were jealous of and occupied or, as symbolically presented in the skit, "murdered") are two such ideological positions. In this sense, what Nikiforos writes is not idiosyncratic; rather, what he writes reflects ideological understandings that he has appropriated through time from school, the home, or television, though it is colored by his own understanding.

Through this play and all the other plays that the children produced and performed, they expressed a sense of identity by turning to their indigenous tradition. Though this tradition could potentially be incorporated into the larger, national tradition and be considered a part of a Hellenocentric argument on identity, it could also work in the opposite direction by emphasizing the local, that which is different, that which is perhaps more crude and "backward" from the noble national or the official face of identity emphasized at school.

The war games played by the children also reflected this preoccupation with local history and culture, rather than the more distant national history they were exposed to at school. Following the violent events at the buffer zone in the summer of 1996, the children of the urban community reproduced in play form what happened during the violent encounter.⁴ In these games, different groups of children represented the different groups of participants involved in the conflict, like the Greek Cypriot demonstrators, the Turkish Cypriot and Turkish counter-demonstrators, the police forces from both sides and the UN soldiers. This history—a part of children's lived history—was an intimate and very relevant history that the children cared about. Living next to the buffer zone provided these children with additional motivation to act out their understandings and emotions about an

event that terrified most of them. On many occasions, these same children told me that they felt scared living near the buffer zone because "the Turks might come and kill us and we won't have time to leave the area."

The subject matter of the children's games and other productions and the voices they accessed to construct their understandings of their identities fed on their local experiences, the local history that impacted them more directly and significantly. Free from the constraints of the classroom as a socio-cultural context where identities are constructed in their official garb, the children turned to what they knew quite well, felt closer to, and better understood.

Discussion

The ethnographic evidence provided suggests that identities are shifting as children move through social space; they are not, as much of the literature on ethnic identity has assumed, fixed and unchanging. An excellent parallel example of the constantly shifting constructions of identity is offered by Kathleen Hall in her study of British-Sikh teenagers. Hall discusses the movement of these teenagers through different social contexts or cultural fields like the home, the school, and the temple "in which are found specific kinds of people, networks or relations, and styles of interacting" and which place upon actors specific kinds of cultural expectations (253). As these teenagers move from one context to another, power relations change offering new opportunities and limitations and ultimately giving rise to a multiplicity of situationally specific cultural identities (253). Thus, some girls change from their Indian outfits into western ones, put on makeup and let their hair free inside the school only to change back again to their original appearance when they leave from school to go home (256). Their fragmented consciousness—as both Indian and British—allows them to play with their identities, to position themselves variously "in the ambiguous spaces of power and culture, between the contextually shifting boundaries of class, race, gender, and family honor" (261).

Michael Herzfeld has offered similar insights into the shifting nature of identity in contemporary Greek society. He argues that Greeks turn to two different images of themselves at different times, in different contexts by drawing a distinction between *self-presentation* and *self-recognition*. In the case of the former, he argues that Greeks turn to a classically derived image of their identity to construct a sense of self that they project primarily to outsiders. In the case of the latter, they turn to a much more familiar and intimate sense of self, the self

of everyday practice that is tainted by foreign or Eastern elements especially the Byzantine and Ottoman pasts of Greek identity. This is the image Greeks project to one another, the identity they use amongst themselves.

It should come as no surprise that much of the children's daily life reveals such contextual shifts of identity since the social spaces through which they move are circumscribed in varied ways. At school, they turn to SMG and to voices which are primarily nationalistic in their content and tone while outside the school, in contexts where identity construction is not as strictly prescribed, they turn to the more local and relevant voices which allow them to construct a different sense of self.

Which linguistic variety one uses—the dialect or SMG—might be indicative of one's identity claims. Turning to SMG signals an attempt to present the more official version of one's identity as a Greek. In this way, one symbolically unites with the Greek nation; being a key component of Greek national identity, SMG as a power language (Hobsbawm)—the language of writing, of the educated and the sophisticated—emphasizes one's Greekness. Turning to the dialect emphasizes one's Cypriotness, a non-pretentious self-presentation, a less "pure" sense of self from a nationalist point of view, yet a self that is simultaneously truer to one's lived, everyday experience. By communicating their Cypriotness, children are not necessarily discounting their other sense of self as primarily Greeks; rather they choose to emphasize one over the other because they are faced with new contextual parameters.

In the flow of daily life, however, there is a much more complex interplay between these two versions of identity which are constantly negotiated and renegotiated as children try to make sense of who they are in a variety of social contexts which place on them varied demands and constraints. Though children's use of diglossia generally conforms with the observations of previous researchers (Karoulla-Vrikkis, Sciriha 1995, 1996), the dynamics of daily interactions also allow for a considerable degree of code-switching and code-mixing within the same contextual parameters as children attempt, consciously or unconsciously, to negotiate and renegotiate their sense of self at any particular moment. That this process of negotiating a sense of self can be more or less successful is indicative of the ever-present tensions in the process of identity construction.

How we position ourselves and how others position themselves in relation to us determines what kinds of identities will be constructed (Davies 361). Thus, a child may position herself as a Greek in

the classroom where the teacher and the subject matter of the lesson define the situation as a context for learning about "our" national identity. But at home, the same child may reposition herself primarily as a Cypriot when she talks to her parents who are members of the left wing and are critical of Greek nationalism. At any particular time, in any particular context, children can be more or less Greeks, more or less Cypriots. Their performances during a national celebration at school will project a strong sense of their national identity as Greeks; their performances in the neighborhood during playtime will draw symbolic material primarily from their local, Cypriot culture. How one negotiates the use of these codes reveals much about the constitution of ethnic identity in the flow of daily life. A child may be more or less Greek, more or less Cypriot depending on the demands of the context and the choices for self-presentation (see Goffman) she or he makes. Much of this adaptability (see McCall and Simmons, Okamura) is perhaps non-conscious or falls into the realm of practical consciousness as Giddens would have it; children exhibit social competence (Hutchby and Moran-Ellis) by adjusting to changing circumstances but this is not necessarily done through a calculated assessment of contextual expectations.

As children move through and participate in different social contexts, they learn to negotiate their social relationships and identities to their advantage (Reed-Danahay, Solberg 119). In the classroom, the children were often able to introduce into the lesson topics of interest to them, to redirect its course, and to have the teacher negotiate her original agenda. Children also learn to negotiate the boundaries between these different contexts (Phelan, Davidson and Cao), sometimes more, sometimes less successfully. For instance, the rural children turned to the dialect in the classroom to a much greater extent than the urban children, despite the fact that the classroom is generally defined as a setting where only SMG is to be used. By doing so, they actively negotiated the boundaries between home and school redefining the latter as a less formal context than officially intended to be.

The insights of symbolic interactionism reinforce this view of children as purposeful and willful individuals who have a self, are capable of interpreting their own and others' behavior, and adjusting their behavior according to the situation (Bluebond-Langner). Social competence requires the ability to adopt different roles in different social contexts as well as the ability "to anticipate, improvise and to manipulate actions relative to changing circumstances" (Baker 47). Although children's knowledge and experience may be limited or, more appropriately, different from that of adults (Waksler 74), they

are nevertheless knowledgeable social actors who are capable of acting competently in the social contexts in which they live.

To understand how children construct and express their ethnic identities, it is imperative that we situate them within these local contexts through which they move and act as well as the larger historical, social, economic, and political contexts in which their lives are embedded. Graue and Walsh (1995, 140) have called for the need to study children in context, both spatial and temporal, and to account for their experiences and life situations (see also Graue and Walsh 1998). Identities are constructed locally (James, Jenks and Prout 214), though they are certainly informed and constrained by larger social structures. Their meaning is not pre-given but takes shape in social interaction.

Though the question of identity may ultimately be theoretically irreducible we may nevertheless try to understand its variable expressions in specific social contexts and at particular moments in history. Rather than trying to theorize the self in its entirety it might be more fruitful to focus on "identity as the confluence of social roles and social positionings that are more or less shifting and negotiable" (Hoffman 328). From this point of view identities cease to be monolithic and stationary and become changing and relational; they cease to be unitary, essential, and bounded and become open, fluid, and multiple; they are emerging and always contextual; they act as social strategies and are constituted in social practice as individuals move through different contexts and position themselves creatively in relation to a variety of others. Put another way, the social experience of being in the world is constantly shifting as we position ourselves within different contexts of experience.⁵ As Andrew Milner explains:

Each of these different spheres of experience involves different ways of construing the world and hence different ways of construing ourselves. Each requires different qualities and behaviors from us; each emphasizes some of our attributes, and ignores or actually suppresses others, and we construe ourselves accordingly. Different realities require different identities. At the rally I am a Fascist but return home to become a loving husband and father. (63-64)

Furthermore, identities are no longer viewed as necessarily rational and consistent but rather as complex and full of contradictions and ambiguities. As Kondo (1990, 24) has put it, these identities are "the result of culturally available meanings and the open-ended, power-laden enactments of those meanings in everyday situations" (see also Kondo 1992). Though identities ultimately remain cultural, they are

nevertheless expressed creatively by the individuals who draw selectively upon culture to construct their sense of self as they strive daily to create a place for themselves in the world.

It is in this sense that Greek Cypriot children are *one but also more than one*, i.e., members of one ethnic group whose identity is expressed in a multiplicity of ways. Though identities are often essentialized and reified at the level of discourse, social practice suggests that they are much more shifting, unstable, ambiguous, and even contradictory. This multiplicity of identity suggests its fluid and malleable character. Identity construction is, in this sense, the very product of social practice and cannot be understood other than in relation to it.

But why is childhood as such of any theoretical significance? Childhood is not just a time for play. What takes place during this phase of the life cycle is sociologically as significant as what takes place at any other phase, be it young adulthood, middle age, or old age. How identities are being fashioned in the early years of life is of enormous theoretical significance to the study of identity construction. Our inability to see children as fully human has limited our investigations into the political and ethnic lives of children, subjects we have traditionally associated with adulthood. To the extent that these topics were worthy of investigation in relation to children, they were to provide evidence for successful socialization or enculturation.

In this article I have shown that we need not see children as simply "preparing for adulthood" and hence as socially incomplete but rather as fully competent social actors who are capable of interpreting their worlds and acting in them based on their interpretations, given the knowledge and experience they have at that particular stage in their life. Contrary to the assumptions of many traditional theories of socialization, children's identities are complex with their own particularities, not mere copies of adult identities. If the children's identity constructions are 'playful' in the sense described above they are no less significant for illustrating the ever-contingent character of identity construction. By looking at children's participation in different social contexts, from the more formal to the more informal, we can begin to appreciate the fluid and changing nature of identity construction. We also learn a great deal about the processes by which individuals—be it children or adults—cope with a world that is full of tensions and contradictions. Theoretically, we move away from static perceptions of identity to more dynamic, contextual, and processual understandings.

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Notes

1. According to the 1960 population census, the Turkish Cypriot community accounted for 18 percent of the total population while the Greek Cypriot community accounted for 80 percent of the total population.
2. Reed-Danahay (196) has observed the same switching of linguistic codes (from high to low) in the classroom among rural French children. She has interpreted the switching as resistance to the school's linguistic code.
3. Similar observations have been made for Black English versus standard English, the latter considered as Good English, the former as Bad English (e.g., Mitchell- Kernan).
4. The violence that broke out at the buffer zone in the summer of 1996 between Greek Cypriot demonstrators and Turkish and Turkish Cypriot counter-demonstrators resulted in the death of two Greek Cypriots.
5. See Layne for an excellent use of a "posture-oriented" approach which views "identity as meaning constructed on an ongoing basis through the everyday practices of making a place in the world, that is, adopting a posture in the context of changing circumstances and uncertain contingencies" (Layne 29).

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